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**New and old ways of exercising power:  
*ICTs for Democracy in Latin America***

*Yanina Welp*

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, Latin American governments have been developing public policies to promote the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and, in particular, the use of Internet, as a tool to improve both the efficiency of government (through e-government) and the quality of democracy (through e-democracy). This paper focuses on e-Democracy, however, a diagnosis of the context is required in order to assess its developments and potentialities. Thus, the paper proposes an analysis of the 'state of democracy', with an overview of the consolidation and quality of democracy, and some basic indicators of development. The second section explores citizens' confidence in the institutions of representative democracy and the electoral turnout. A third one, explores the spread and uses of direct democracy mechanisms, given that it provides useful information about current political conflicts and tensions between grassroots-based democracy and concentration of power (often in hands of the president). Finally, electronic initiatives to promote transparency, deliberation and participation are investigated. By crossing both approaches we want to assess not only the actual evolution of e-democracy but also their future potentialities and risks.

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## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

In the eighties and nineties in Western countries scholars were beginning to comment on a crisis of representative democracy which was becoming evident in a decrease in participation in elections, in the distrust and lack of interest of citizens in politics, and in the fall of partisan and union affiliation (Lipset 1992; Putnam 2003; Hague and Loader 1999). In this context of crisis, many initiatives, including those based on information and communication technologies (ICTs from now on), have been developed with the aim of revitalising democracy, increasing transparency in public management and opening up new spaces for political participation.

Even if there are some common points, a look at Latin America shows a different picture. In most countries of the region the transition from dictatorship to democracy began in the eighties. In this sense, far from being “frozen” (as Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; or Mair, 1997; suggested for the political parties affiliations in Western countries), until now political affiliations have been weak in the majority of countries in Latin America which -with a few exceptions (e.g. Uruguay)- are characterized by weak political party system institutionalization, high volatility of voters preferences from one election to the next and a more important role played by charisma than by ideology (e.g. Ecuador, Perú). Furthermore, although democracy has persevered in most cases, it coexists with a recurrent political and economical crises, high level of institutional instability, political polarization and citizen dissatisfaction. Which role can and should play the ICTs in this scenario?

The development of e-government is desirable for various reasons that are mainly linked to improving the efficiency of public administration; that is, the streamlining of services, the reduction of costs, the reduction of personnel within the state bureaucracy and the reduction of waiting times, amongst others. While this was the main argument with respect to public administration, it was accompanied by an emphasis on the potential for improving the quality of democracy. e-democracy has been defined as the use of electronic communication as a means for granting citizens the power to make lawmakers

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and politicians accountable for their actions in the public sphere by strengthening transparency in the political process, the improvement of the quality of the stages of opinion formation or the increase of citizen participation in the decision-making process (Trechsel *et al* 2003: 10). Thus, the uses of technology by governments in order to improve their relationship with citizens may be approached from different angles. On the one hand, we found issues strictly associated with the quality of democracy, which technology could influence when more information on public space management is made available to the citizens, generating more transparency and opening more and/or better channels of communication with them. On the other, technological innovation in the Public Administration may also change the delivery of public utilities, increasing management efficiency and transparency, which would lead to an improvement in levels of citizen satisfaction. Transparency could also stimulate self-control and reduce the level of corruption. Thus, an improvement of the services delivered produces consequences for the legitimacy of the political system. However, certain elitist service developments could also lead to an increase in the differences among population groups (those having access, who would benefit from them, and those who do not).

Should governments concentrate their efforts in improving efficiency, transparency and accountability or should they also aim to increase the participation of citizens in decision-making? Is there a risk of reinforcing inequality through the promotion of ICT's for democracy in countries with a considerable digital divide? Is there a risk of reinforcing populism and concentration of power leaving the promotion of ICT's in hands of strong presidents of the sort that prevail in many Latin American countries today? To deal with these questions the paper proposes: i) to explore the outputs of democracy in Latin America with an overview of indicators of quality of democracy (such as that provided by Freedom House), corruption and transparency, access to public information; and also basic indicators of welfare (such as per capita Income and human development) and digital divide; ii) the electoral turnout and the ways in which democracy is being challenged by the increasing lack of citizen confidence in the institutions of representative democracy; iii) the incorporation and uses of direct democracy mechanisms. With the picture of democracy and its trends, we analyze iv) the main developments of ICTs for democracy and good governance initiated by



national governments. The paper ends with a conclusion on the trends, risks and potentialities.

## **1. The preconditions: state of Democracy, welfare and development**

This research is focused on 17 Latin American countries<sup>2</sup>. Among these countries, democracy has worked continuously at least throughout the last fifty years in Costa Rica (61 years), Colombia (51) and Venezuela (50); for between 21 and 31 years in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru, Uruguay; and for less than twenty years in Chile (19), El Salvador (17), Paraguay<sup>3</sup>, Panama (15), and Mexico (9). This suggests that there is no correlation between the duration of democracy and the system's stability given that some of the older democracies are also the most unstable or violent, such as Venezuela and Colombia respectively; and some of the younger democracies can be included in the group of the most consolidated not only in the region but also in the world, such Uruguay or Brazil. Secondly, a paradox undergone by most Latin American countries is frequently quoted as on the one hand, they have more or less institutionalised a democratic regime as a form of government but, on the other, they face a succession of social and political crises. There are abundant examples of this. Many popular demonstrations have led to early elections and/or the establishment of transition and provisional governments. Among others, we may recall the fall of presidents Abdalá Bucarám (1997), Jamil Mahuad (1999) and Lucio Gutiérrez (2005) in Ecuador; Fernando Color de Mello (1992) in Brazil; Fernando de la Rúa in Argentina (2001) or Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada (2003) and Carlos Mesa (2005) in Bolivia. Twelve presidents in eight of the seventeen countries analyzed here were unable to complete their mandate (see Table 1).

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<sup>2</sup> Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela.

<sup>3</sup> There is a debate around the point in which democracy was reestablished in Paraguay. Since the end of the dictatorship of General Alfredo Stroessner in 1989, the Colorado Party won the next four presidential elections, despite administrations repeatedly characterized by economic mismanagement and inefficiency, rampant corruption, and almost constant inter-factional power struggles within the party. Indeed, to a great extent, established political and bureaucratic elites in the Colorado Party have successfully defended their privileges in the new democratic environment and controlled many aspects of the (unconsolidated) transition. It means that there was a continuous control of the state resources by the Colorado's Party during 61 years until 2008, when the ex Catholic priest Fernando Lugo arrived to the Presidency as a candidate of a broad coalition.

According to Freedom House, nine of the countries studied here were considered as free democracies in 2008, being the other eight qualified as a *partly free* countries. The picture of the corruption and lack of transparency is much worse. The Corruption Perceptions Index for 2006 shows that just two countries can be considered 'relatively clean' (Uruguay and Chile), while the rest are qualified as *corrupt* or *highly corrupt* (the latest applies for Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Venezuela) (for details see table 1). A third index concerning to transparency on Budgetary Information (Open Budget Index) shows a similar picture. Among the thirteen Latin American countries analyzed, just Brazil and Peru provide with *significant* information while none shows an *extensive* provision, in five the provision is qualified as *minimal* (Ecuador, El Salvador) or *scant* (Bolivia, Honduras, Panama) and the rest of the countries provide *some* information (note that Chile and Uruguay were not included in this sample).<sup>4</sup> The lack of transparency not necessarily leads to corruption, but is clearly against the quality of democracy and contributes to hide corruption.

Crossing the Freedom House Index with the Index of Human Development we find seven countries which are considered as *free* democracies with high level of Human Development (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Uruguay and Panama), six are *Partly free* democracies with *medium* level of Human development (Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Paraguay) and four countries which are *free* democracy with *medium* level of Human Development (El Salvador, Peru) or *partly free* democracies with *high* level of Human Development (Ecuador, Venezuela). On the contrary high levels of corruption are displayed as much in poorer (e.g. Nicaragua) as in wealthier countries (e.g. Argentina). The same applies for poverty. The highest proportions of the population living below the poverty line are observed not only in those countries that are the poorest countries in terms of GDP per capita (Paraguay, Nicaragua and Honduras, with 60% living below the poverty line), but also in some of the countries with relatively high GDP per capita, such as Brazil or Mexico, where over 30% live below the poverty line. Until 2007 Latin America lived a period of four years of solid economic growth, however, poverty figures

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<sup>4</sup> Even if some aspects of these indicators are controversial the information provided and the procedures followed to classify the information results in a valuable assessment (for methodological information about the three indexes see the notes in Table 1 and 2)

went down just slightly. Persistent poverty and corruption have to be considered in order to understand citizen's distrust and dissatisfaction.

Another precondition for analysing the potentialities of ICT's for reinforcing democracy is that the use and availability of ICT's be sufficiently widespread. As several scholars have pointed out, widespread access to the internet is conditional on wealth (Hargittai 1999, Guillén and Suárez 2001, Milner 2002). But even if it has been at different speeds and with different consequences for social organization, internet diffusion has been remarkable in all the regions of the world, including Latin America, where a gradual and considerable increase of users who could provide sustenance to these new initiatives is observed (see table 2). Data from the International Telecommunications Union for 2007 show that the most advanced countries have around 35% of internet users (Brazil 35%, Costa Rica 34%), while in some poorer countries access to the internet remains near or below 10 % (Nicaragua 2,8%, Honduras 6%, Paraguay 8.6%, Guatemala 10,2%, Bolivia 10.5%, El Salvador 11,1%). Although figures for internet access are low in this latter group of countries, with notable exceptions (Nicaragua) they also show a constant and rather rapid growth. Furthermore, if we observe the spread of other technologies, such as phone lines and cellular phones we can see that technology has spread throughout the region when it is perceived as useful. In any case, the considerable gap between those who have access and those who not is an important challenge for governments.

In the next section, we propose to analyze the role of citizens, with special emphasis on turnout and confidence in the institutions of representative democracy.

## **2. The strength of political institutions, participation, and representation**

Given the lack of transparency and the extent to which corruption is endemic to most Latin American countries, is not surprising to find a high level of citizen distrust in political institutions. Although there are remarkable differences between countries, according with CIMA 2008 in all of them citizens trust more in the Church (the average confidence was 67%) and Television News (52%) than in

Justice (30%), Parliament (22%) or Political Parties (15%). In four countries, confidence in Parliament is less than 10% (Ecuador, Panama, Paraguay and Peru) while the highest level of confidence is displayed by Uruguay (55%) and Venezuela (42%). The situation is even worse for political parties, here with the exception of Uruguay (40%) and Guatemala (34%), in all the countries confidence is located below 30% with the lowest figures in Bolivia (8%), Chile and Paraguay (5%), Ecuador and Peru (4%). (See table 3)

Despite the bad results quoted above, polls such as Latinobarómetro and CIMA show that governments are steadily becoming more popular and many political institutions somewhat more trusted. Comparing data for 2002 and 2008 for parliament and political parties we can observe that in most of the countries confidence has increased (considerably in cases such as Uruguay and Venezuela) while just in three it has continued to fall (Chile, Perú and Costa Rica). Latinobarómetro 2007 suggest that Latin Americans are becoming disillusioned with the market economy and they want a fairer distribution of income and a state that gives greater social protection. Unfortunately, this feeling is leading to democracy losing its position as the preferred system of government. Only 54% of respondents were convinced democrats and in only five countries has support for democracy risen since the previous year: in Costa Rica and Panama, where popular social-democratic leaders are in office, and in Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua, whose left-wing presidents, respectively Evo Morales, leader of the Movement for Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo); Rafael Correa leader of a coalition created by himself in 2006, Alliance PAIS, and Daniel Ortega Sandinista National Liberation Front (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional or FSLN), represent constituencies who have previously felt excluded from power. We should mention that while the popularity of democracy has increased in these three countries, that of political parties has continued to fall (see table 3). This suggests that leaders are increasing their power against institutions of representative democracy. Only in Uruguay does the pattern seem to be different, following the arrival in power of the Broad Front (Frente Amplio), which broke the traditional Uruguayan bipartidism and has reinforced the role of the political parties.

Electoral turnout has to be considered, given that the discourse promoting e-democracy has underlined the potential of ICT to increase it. It should be noted

that in a good proportion of the Latin American countries voting is compulsory. However countries either do not enforce compulsory voting laws (i.e Bolivia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Paraguay and Honduras) or the enforcement is weak (Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Chile). Thus, despite compulsory voting, it seems that these 'laws are created to merely state the government's position regarding what the citizen's responsibility should be'<sup>5</sup>. In any case, the average turnout in the six last elections (parliamentary and presidential) is 67%, with strong differences between the highest turnout -Uruguay with 90,7% (and strict enforcement of compulsory voting)- and the lowest -Colombia with 36,6% and El Salvador with 45% on average. The lowest turnout is registered in the countries in which voting is not compulsory. However, also countries without compulsory voting show low turnout (Guatemala, 48% or Mexico 59%) and countries with compulsory voting shows turnout above the average (as Nicaragua with 70% or Panama 75%) (see table 4).

A surprising finding emerges from the evolution of the number of the registered voter's over time. By analyzing the increase of registered voters from the first election of the eighties until the last (e.g. for Ecuador since the elections of 1984 to the elections in 2006) a huge increase of the voters is observed. In the case of Ecuador the electoral roll increased by 145% during the twenty-two year period while the natural increase of population for the same period was just 51%, meaning that at least 62% of the increase in the registered voters comes from the extension of political rights (probably indigenous and rural population not registered previously). A similar picture emerges for several other countries in which a huge increase in the number of voters cannot be explained by the natural increase in the population. This quantitative extension of political rights also exceed 40% (over and above the natural increase in the population) in Brazil, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and Peru (for detailed information see table 4). Only in Chile and Costa Rica does the opposite apply, i.e the increase in population outweighs the increase in the number of registered voters (a relative fall in the number of registered voters of 14% and 3% respectively). The large anomaly in Chile can be explained by the fact that one is required to vote only if is a registered voter, but is not compulsory to register. This apparent drop in the proportion of the population that is registered to vote could therefore be explained by a failure to register.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.idea.int/vt/compulsory\\_voting.cfm](http://www.idea.int/vt/compulsory_voting.cfm)

### **3. Opening democracy (I)? The case of Direct Democracy Mechanisms<sup>6</sup>**

In recent times there has been observed a remarkable increase in both, constitutional reforms to introduce or extend direct democracy mechanisms (DDMs) as well as calls for a referendum. More than 40% of the referendums to have occurred in Latin America in the last fifty years have been carried out in the last decade. The explanation for this evolution is unclear. Barczak (2001) argue that 'the introduction of direct democracy mechanisms is typically driven by traditionally excluded political interests. It takes two forms, both involving the failure of representative democratic institutions. In most cases, these traditionally excluded interests win control over the constitutional reform and rewriting process, although this is not a necessary condition for the emergence of direct democracy'. Even if this condition applies in the most controversial cases (Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador), it has to be underlined that both governments on the left and governments on the right have promoted the inclusion of DDMs, (e.g. Venezuela 1999, Peru 1993). Although in some countries the introduction of DDMs has been a response to citizens' demands for more participation (e.g. Colombia 1991), this has not been the case in others (e.g. Costa Rica 2006). Moreover, DDMs have been introduced both against the backdrop of a serious political crisis (e.g. Bolivia 2004) and in the absence of such crisis (Brazil 1988, 2003). Some scholars have also underlined the risks of manipulation and a tendency towards populism which could be promoted by the referendum in presidential regimes. DDM includes a broad range of mechanisms which can lead to different results and can take different forms ('bottom up', 'top down' and a combination of both). The picture of norms and practices of DDMs shows a huge variation amongst Latin American Countries (see table 5).

We should note that a large group of countries have never used DDMs (El Salvador, Honduras, Paraguay, and Nicaragua) or have used them only rarely (Argentina, Guatemala, Peru and Costa Rica) even though they have introduced them in a formal sense. Costa Rica is a special case given that a consultation occurred after the constitutional amendment (2006) which, among others,

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<sup>6</sup> This section is based in a previous research on direct democracy mechanisms in LA (Welp 2009).

allowed DDMs as a bottom up mechanism and raised the promotion of participatory democracy. However, despite the new law, the call was initiated by presidential decree and in the context of growing political polarization around the acceptance or rejection of the Free Trade Agreement with the United States. Peru (1993) and Guatemala (1994) show a contradictory pattern. In both countries the president (Alberto Fujimori, and Jorge Serrano, respectively) closed the Parliament in a self-suspending democracy and received the weight of international opposition. A referendum allowed Fujimori to give a democratic veneer to its management and stay in power (until 2000). Serrano was forced to resign and was the new government, during the reorganization of the political system, who called for a referendum to legitimize the process. From these cases emerged a common point which is the flexible interpretation or clear violation of the law. This was clear in the case of Fujimori, but also in Costa Rica the procedure to call the referendum was not the one established by the constitution.

In a second group are located countries that have conducted some referendums, such as Brazil, Colombia, Panama. In Brazil there have been three consultations, but, except the last one, which opened a debate on keeping and bearing arms, subject of public interest given the murder rate in this country, none of these consultations appear to have greater impact on the definition of public policies. According with his Constitution, Panama has used the mechanism mainly to take decisions about the Channel.

The most intensive users of the referendum are Uruguay, Ecuador, Venezuela and Bolivia<sup>7</sup>. Auer (2007) points out that in Uruguay, 'unlike in many other countries of the continent, but like in Switzerland, these devices are not at the disposal of the executive power but depend on the will of the people itself and on parliament'. This explains decades of prodigious use and continuous experiences with direct democracy mechanisms that have acted as a strong factor of political legitimization, promoted political consensus and brought about the most consociational regime in South America. In the other three cases in which direct democracy plays a crucial role, conflict is the main feature of the system. The weak institutionalization of the political party system and the increasing

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<sup>7</sup> These four cases are responsible for almost 75% of referendums to be held in the last 25 years, and Uruguay has conducted a third of the total number of referendums in the last fifty years.

dissatisfaction of the citizenry with the government parallel with social exclusion and political inclusion (in the minimalistic sense of basic political rights such as the right to vote) has promoted a radical change in these political systems. Direct democracy has become a potent weapon to resolve situations of political impasse. In these cases the most common reason to call for a referendum is an attempt to resolve a struggle between parliament and the president or the president and the governors or authorities of the opposition. Consultations initiated by the president accompany profound political and social conflict. In this scenario, with minimum guarantees of the rule of law, the dispute between the traditional power removed from the government and the new movements creates intensive ideological polarization and 'dirty' campaigns. We should underline that in Venezuela and Bolivia it is not only the president that uses the referendum. The constitutional reforms which introduced or increased direct democracy also allow citizens, organizations, political parties or whoever else to collect signatures and call for a referendum. This occurred in Venezuela in 2004 and on several occasions in the Bolivia's instable and conflictive democracy. Despite the questionable ability of these mechanisms to produce an open democratic debate, let me stress that direct democracy has provided an institutional arena to resolve political conflict. While the immediate effect of the referendum is a high social polarization, in the long run it could be a first step towards acceptance of the rules of the democratic game.

#### **4. Opening Democracy (II)? The promotion of ICT's for democracy**

Finally we can analyze the spread of e-democracy by the Latin American governments. In order to examine what type of actions are promoted, while considering the peculiarities of each of the analyzed countries, we have searched for initiatives oriented towards: i. the citizen's right to access public information; ii. efficiency in the delivery of public services; and iii. Citizens' participation as a fundamental right. To this end, we have focused on initiatives that are developed by the national or federal government and that are available on the Web<sup>8</sup>.

By analyzing the government portals, we distinguished three different types of device: portals that are a means to communicate government activities (typically

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<sup>8</sup> The fieldwork was done between December 2006 and march of 2007. A complete report can be consulted in Welp 2007 (in English) or Welp 2008 (an updated version in Spanish).



these are more an exercise in propagandist than a genuine device to provide information), those organized by the administration offer that offer technical information and legal acts, and those organized in a more user-friendly manner to satisfy citizens' needs (e.g. by profile, theme and/or key facts). In many cases, there is both a government portal and a presidential portal operating in parallel, the latter one frequently having clear propagandist purposes. There are also portals that have a lot of different types of information on their home page, thus creating a complicated map of scarcely-accessible information. Most governmental portals directed to provide information about the government itself do not have a guide of procedures (explaining when, where and how to do specific procedures and in the most developed systems allowing to do it online) and, in general, there are no real initiatives oriented to the administrative reform and the promotion of better services (Ecuador, Honduras, Guatemala, Dominican Republic). However, Honduras and Guatemala, although they have not developed this type of initiative, do have electronic systems for state purchasing and procurement. As a general finding, most portals are organized as citizen-oriented portals (8 cases); most are also organized according to the offering of the administration, with information on programs and governmental units (7 cases) stand out; and finally, some portals operate as a new window on governmental activity (4 cases). (See detailed information in Table 6)

As an initiative related to transparency and the reduction of corruption but also with consequences for administrative modernization and the internal efficiency of management, the setting up of state contracting and procurement systems stands out. The majority of latin American countries have developed these systems, except for El Salvador, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Venezuela. In the cases where the system operates electronically, ICTs are described as a source of transparency, efficiency (as the aim is to increase the number of suppliers and to improve the quality-price ratio) and promotion of ICTs use (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, among others). Many of these initiatives or others oriented towards transparency and the access to public information have been developed with international cooperation funds (Costa Rica, Panama, Honduras, Bolivia, Peru). We found that cases with lower levels of wealth and spread of technology such as Bolivia, Panama and Peru. Among the reflections made, in the first place we should highlight the influence of the economic support of international organizations in the development of this kind of initiatives. In the

second place, we identified the need for a concrete approach to the practices, uses and outcomes, allowing us to differentiate rhetoric from concrete actions. This becomes particularly evident in initiatives oriented towards citizen participation, which generally lack of any explanatory framework concerning the real consequences citizen participation could have.

We explored initiatives for citizen participation, ranging from more basic forms (e-mail delivery) to the possibility of submitting bills or requesting specialized information, or the creation of interactive spaces to have an influence on the design of public policies. Here we may see a greater difference among actions because, while in some cases the creation of sectorial forums, for example, has been promoted (Mexico, Bolivia) or virtual legislative programs in which citizens may participate have been created (such as the virtual Parliament in Peru and Chile), in other cases, the appeal to citizens is mainly symbolic, as in the case of virtual mailboxes to write to the President (Paraguay). It is important to differentiate the opening of 'symbolic' spaces of participation from spaces where it is possible to raise and follow-up proposals, and from spaces of citizen interaction designed for the formulation of bills. Most of the latter were developed by the legislative assembly.

The portals of the legislative power have also spread, with the exception of Honduras. Among them, it is important to differentiate those providing information from those that have implemented more advanced systems for citizen participation, either through individual access and submission of proposals and questions and/or through the creation of discussion forums (Panama, Peru). As was noted for Frick (2005) in a previous research, 'For the time being, initiatives respond to the object of enhancing information and opinion instances of both citizens and electors; only exceptionally, do these initiatives respond to the strengthening of the political process' transparency or to higher effective involvement and participation of citizens in the decision-making process'.

## **5. Final Remarks**

To sum up, Latin America is characterized by a high level of corruption and poverty, increasing distrust in the institutions of representative democracy,

increasing political conflict and polarization within the framework of recurrent political crises. These crises mainly stem from inequality and poverty but but are exacerbated by corruption and/or as a result of the failure of elected governments to comply with their electoral programs. In this context, how are ICTs being used to contribute to reinforce good governance and democracy?

First of all, despite the digital gap, the promotion of ICTs is significant and has gained an increasing weight. The use of ICTs by Latin American governments is widespread. All of them have developed government portals and have strategic and/or action plans. With different emphases and consequences, all these actions could contribute to citizens' satisfaction, the legitimacy of the political system and governance, both in terms of increased control over governments (which would put pressure on those governments to improve their results), and in terms of improving the services delivered or the capacity of the citizens to submit proposals or have a say beyond elections. However, the situation among countries is diverse and analyzing the way ICTs are used is complex.

While e-government (i.e. the use of ICT to improve efficiency and quality of the public administration) seems to have a clear place in the governmental agenda, e-democracy (understood as the use of ICT to increase citizen's access to information and open new channels for participation) has an uncertain place. Such policies have been directed in particular towards the creation of both transparency in governance and the improvement of citizen satisfaction with public administration, both of which are more linked with the improvement of accountability and public service satisfaction than with democratic participation in decision-making process.

Institutional instability in Latin American countries is reinforced by the fact that elections are the primary mechanism of accountability. Elections are central to democratic life, but are not enough to promote responsible governments. The Uruguayan case is emblematic, direct democracy has played a constant role allowing the voters to propose laws or to act against unpopular policies. In this case citizens have in their hands a mechanism that allows them to intervene directly in the process of policy making. By contrast, in countries where a significant segment of the public has been excluded from access to public goods and lack institutional mechanisms at their disposal, discontent and spontaneous

protest are common. This is a democratic voice, but often arrives too late, as the Argentinian crisis of 2001 demonstrates, when half of the population fell below the poverty line.

New political actors and respect for the rules of the democratic game is forcing an opening up the system. Latin America needs more and better channels for citizens to make decisions; however, strong political leaderships and the digital divide invite us to be cautious. Latin America needs better institutions for a better government. In this sense, there is no doubt about the benefits of an efficient and transparent government. Transparency in government activities has an effect of control on the government, and of learning for citizens, who will be more qualified for decision making. The fight against corruption and access to information of public interest is maybe not revolutionary, but can encourage important changes in a region in constant movement.

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- Freedom House - [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org))
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- ITU: <http://www.itu.int>
- Latinobarómetro 2007: <http://www.latinobarometro.org>
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<http://www.redgealc.net>

**Tabla 1: Year of the transition to democracy, government interrupted and assessment of democracy and corruption**

Country	Year Transition		Resignations by popular pressure (since 1980)	Freedom and Democracy <sup>1</sup>		Status	Corruption <sup>2</sup>		Open Budget Index <sup>3</sup>
				PR	CL		Rank	CPI Scores	
Argentina	1983	26	2001 (Fernando De la Rúa)	2	2	Free	93	2,9 <i>Highly corrupt</i>	56 <i>Some</i>
Bolivia	1982	27	1985 (Hernán Silas Suazo) 2003 (Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada) 2005 (Carlos Mesa)	3	3	Partly Free	105	2,7 <i>Highly corrupt</i>	6 <i>Scant</i>
Brasil	1985	24	1992 (Fernando Collor de Mello)	2	2	Free	70	3,3 <i>Corrupt</i>	74 <i>Significant</i>
Chile	1990	19	--	1	1	Free	20	7,3	na
Colombia	1958	51	--	3	4	Partly Free	59	3,9 <i>Corrupt</i>	60 <i>Some</i>
Costa Rica	1948	61	--	1	1	Free	55	4,1 <i>Corrupt</i>	45 <i>Some</i>
Ecuador	1979	30	1997 (Abdala Bucaram) 1999 (Jamil Mahuad) 2005 (Lucio Gutiérrez)	3	3	Partly Free	138	2,3 <i>Highly corrupt</i>	38 <i>Minimal</i>
El Salvador	1992	17	--	2	3	Free	57	4 <i>Corrupt</i>	37 <i>Minimal</i>
Guatemala	1986	23	1993 (Jorge Serrano Elías)	3	4	Partly Free	111	2,6 <i>Highly corrupt</i>	45 <i>Some</i>
Honduras	1982	27	--	3	3	Partly Free	121	2,5 <i>Highly corrupt</i>	11 <i>Scant</i>
México	2000	9	--	2	3	Free	70	3,3 <i>Corrupt</i>	54 <i>Some</i>
Nicaragua	1979	30	--	4	3	Partly Free	111	2,6 <i>Highly corrupt</i>	18 <i>Scant</i>
Panamá	1994	15	--	1	2	Free	84	3,1 <i>Corrupt</i>	na
Paraguay	1993	16 <sup>4</sup>	1999 (Raúl Cubas Grau)	3	3	Partly Free	111	2,6 <i>Highly corrupt</i>	na
Perú	1980	29	2000 (Alberto Fujimori)	2	3	Free	70	3,3 <i>Corrupt</i>	66 <i>Significant</i>
R.Dominicana	1978	31	1994 (Joaquín Balaguer)	2	2	Free	99	2,8 <i>Highly corrupt</i>	11 <i>Scant</i>
Uruguay	1985	24	--	1	1	Free	28	6,4	na
Venezuela	1959	50	1993 (Carlos Andrés Pérez)	4	4	Partly Free	141	2,3 <i>Highly corrupt</i>	35 <i>Minimal</i>

Source: Information based on the history of each country, Freedom House, Transparency International and Open Budget Index.

- (1) *Freedom and Democracy*: PR and CL stand for political rights and civil liberties, respectively; 1 represents the most free and 7 the least free rating. The ratings reflect global events from January 1, 2008, through December 31, 2008. The ratings reflect an overall judgment based on survey results and then assigns each country and territory a broad category status of *Free* (for countries whose ratings average 1.0 to 2.5), *Partly Free* (3.0 to 5.0), or *Not Free* (5.5 to 7.0). According with Freedom House, the survey does not rate governments or government performance *per se*, but rather the real-world rights and social freedoms enjoyed by individuals. Freedoms can be affected by state actions, as well as by nonstate actors, including insurgents and other armed groups. (See Methodology Summary [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org))
- (2) *Corruption Perception Index 2006*. Transparency International. <http://www.transparency.org> 'CPI Score' relates to perceptions of the degree of corruption as seen by business people and country analyst and ranged between 10 (highly clean) and 0 (highly corrupt)
- (3) *Open Budget Index 2008*. The Survey is based on a questionnaire that is intended to collect a comparative dataset in 85 countries. It groups questions into three sections: 1) the dissemination of budget information, 2) the executive's annual budget proposal to the legislature and the availability of other information that would contribute to analysis of budget policies and practices, and 3) the four phases of the budget process. The countries that scored between 81-100 are placed in the performance category *Provides Extensive Information*, those with scores 61-80 % in *Provides Significant Information*, those with scores 41-60 % in *Provides Some Information*, those with scores 21-40 % in *Provides Minimal Information*, and those with scores 0-20 % in *Provides Scant or No Information*. <http://www.openbudgetindex.org/>
- (4) It is difficult to fix a date for the transition in Paraguay. Could be consider that it start when the dictator period finish (1989) or when the Partido Colorado lost the power in free elections after 61 years of full control of the state in 2008. Here we decided to put an intermediate date.



**Table 2: Human Development, GDP per cápita , Poverty, telephone lines, cell phones and Internet Spread**

	Human Development <sup>1</sup>	GDP (PPP) per cápita <sup>2</sup>	Poverty <sup>3</sup>		Subscribers per 100 inhabitants 2007 <sup>4</sup>		Internet Users <sup>5</sup>			
			Poverty	Extreme poverty	Telephone	Mobile Cellular	2001	2003	2005	2007
Argentina	0.86 <i>high</i>	13,244	23.8	8.2	126	102	9.8	11.9	17.7	25.9
Bolivia	0.72 <i>medium</i>	4,208	54	31	41	34	2.1	3.5	5.2	10.5
Brazil	0.81 <i>high</i>	15,570	30	8.5	84	63	4.5	9.9	19.5	35.2
Chile	0.87 <i>high</i>	13,885	13.7	3.2	104	84	19.9	25.1	17.2	30.9
Colombia	0.79 <i>medium</i>	6,958	46.8	20.2	91	74	2.7	7.1	10.5	26.2
Costa Rica	0.85 <i>high</i>	10,658	18.6	5.3	66	34	9.6	21.5	25.4	33.6
Ecuador	0.81 <i>high</i>	7,397	42.6	16	89	76	2.7	4.4	4.7	13.1
El Salvador	0.75 <i>medium</i>	5,735	47.5	19	105	90	2.3	8.3	9.3	11.1
Guatemala	0.70 <i>medium</i>	4,483	54.8	29.1	66	76	1.7	4.6	7.9	10.2
Honduras	0.71 <i>medium</i>	3,682	68.9	45.6	40	30	1.4	2.7	3.6	6
Mexico	0.84 <i>high</i>	12,780	31.7	8.7	83	64	7.5	12.1	18.1	20.7
Nicaragua	0.70 <i>medium</i>	2,485	61.9	31.9	37	38	1.5	2.0	2.7	2.8
Panama	0.83 <i>high</i>	11,623	29	12	86	72	4.0	5.5	6.4	22.2
Paraguay	0.75 <i>medium</i>	4,332	60.5	31.6	78	71	1.1	2.1	3.4	8.6
Peru	0.79 <i>medium</i>	7,842	44.5	16.1	65	55	7.6	10.5	16.4	27.4
Uruguay	0.86 <i>high</i>	11,236	21.7	1.7	119	90	11.2	16.0	20.2	29
Venezuela	0.83 <i>high</i>	12,168	28.5	8.5	105	86	4.7	7.5	12.5	20.7
	0.79	--	40.8	17.8	81	67	4.5	8	10.8	19.6

Sources: UNDP 2008, World Bank 2008, ECLAC 2007, ITU

(1) The HDI combines three dimensions: Life expectancy at birth, as an index of population health and longevity; Knowledge and education, as measured by the adult literacy rate (with two-thirds weighting) and the combined primary, secondary, and tertiary gross enrollment ratio; and Standard of living, as measured by the natural logarithm of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita at purchasing power parity (PPP) in United States dollars. UNDP: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/>

(2) Per capita values were obtained by dividing the PPP GDP data by the Population data. Comparisons of national wealth are frequently made on the basis of purchasing power parity (PPP), to adjust for differences in the cost of living in different countries. PPP removes the exchange rate problem. Given that has its own drawbacks PPP per capita figures are more narrowly spread than GDP per capita figures. World Development Indicators database, 2008. <http://www.worldbank.org/>

(3) Data from ECLAC but for Argentina and Uruguay data is from INDEC and INE respectively *Poverty* is defined as the percentage of the population having incomes amounting to less than twice the cost of a basic food basket and includes indigent population. *Indigence* is measured as the percentage of the population having incomes amounting to less than the cost of basic food basket. [http://www.eclac.org/publicaciones/xml/7/35327/LCG2399B\\_1.pdf](http://www.eclac.org/publicaciones/xml/7/35327/LCG2399B_1.pdf) (pg 55)

(4) ITU 2007, <http://www.itu.int>

(5) Data for 2001, 2003 and 2005 is from the World Bank. Data for 2007 is from the International Telecommunications Union.

**Tabla 3: Trust and Confidence in institutions (2002, 2005 and 2008) and preference for Democracy as a system of government**

Country	Church		TVNews		Parliament		Political Parties		Justice		Democracy is preferable to any other type of government			
	2002	2008	2002	2008	2002	2008	2002	2008	2002	2008	1996	2001	2007	Change since 2006
Argentina	57	53	53	51	7	13	8	10	19	22	71	58	63	-11
Bolivia	79	82	70	43	16	27	6	8	20	35	64	54	67	5
Brazil	61	68	50	59	16	23	6	13	23	41	50	30	43	-3
Chile	56	53	60	49	29	11	12	5	22	14	54	45	56	-10
Colombia	79	71	55	63	22	29	19	20	42	47	60	36	47	-6
Costa Rica	68	64	72	61	31	19	19	17	48	26	80	71	83	8
Ecuador	73	70	71	61	na	5	na	4	20	15	52	40	65	11
El Salvador	na	89	na	44	na	22	na	16	na	38	56	25	38	-13
Guatemala	na	72	na	33	na	22	na	34	na	36	50	33	32	-9
Honduras	88	84	67	64	28	31	18	26	na	26	42	57	38	-13
Mexico	57	59	65	60	26	30	21	12	24	31	53	46	48	-6
Nicaragua	na	72	na	69	na	22	na	14	na	33	59	43	61	5
Panama	80	81	59	52	8	9	8	11	28	15	75	34	62	7
Paraguay	na	71	na	69	na	9	na	5	na	17	59	35	33	-8
Peru	73	63	49	41	24	7	10	4	19	16	63	62	47	-8
Uruguay	37	31	62	36	29	55	25	40	45	61	80	79	75	-2
Venezuela	74	55	77	34	15	42	11	15	21	36	62	70	67	5
Average	68	67	62	52	21	22	14	15	28	30	61	48	54	-2,3

Sources:

- (1) Barómetro Iberoamericano de Gobernabilidad 2002, 2005 y 2008, Consorcio Iberoamericano de Investigaciones de Mercados y Asesoramiento. [www.cimaiberoamerica.com](http://www.cimaiberoamerica.com)
- (2) Latinobarómetro 2007

**Table 4: Natural and non natural increase of registered voters, extension of political rights and turnout in the last three Presidential and Parliamentary elections**

Country	% increase reg. voters <sup>1</sup>	% increase population <sup>2</sup>	% increase non natural <sup>3</sup>	Turnout average <sup>4</sup>	Presidential						Parliamentary					
					Vote 1		Vote 2		Vote 3		Vote 1		Vote 2		Vote 3	
Argentina	45,6	37,06	6	74,4	1999	78,6	2003	76,9	2007	71,8	2001	75,2	2005	70,9	2007	73,1
Bolivia	83,2	71,46	7	76	1997	71,4	2002	72,1	2005	84,5	1997	71,4	2002	72,1	2005	84,5
Brazil	113,7	48,13	44	78,6	1998	78,5	2002	79,5	2006	83,2	1998	78,5	2002	68,7	2006	83,3
Chile	8,8	25,85	-14	87,8	1993	90,5	1999	90,6	2005	83,9	1997	87,3	2001	86,6	2005	87,7
Colombia	93,8	53,78	26	36,6	na	na	2002	46,4	2006	45,1	1998	45	2002	42,5	2006	40,5
Costa Rica	71	76,8	-3	66,5	1998	70	2002	60,2	2006	65,2	1998	70	2002	68,8	2006	65,1
Ecuador	145,8	51,28	62	63,9	1998	70,1	2002	62,9	2006	76	1998	47,3	2002	63,5	2006	63,5
El Salvador	137,6	41,4	68	45,0	1994	46,2	1999	38,6	2004	66,2	2000	38,1	2003	28,4	2006	52,6
Guatemala	154,2	72,75	47	48,5	1999	40,4	2003	46,8	2007	48,1	1999	40,4	2003	54,5	2007	60,5
Honduras	223,3	101,94	60	62,9	1997	72,1	2001	66,3	2005	55,1	1997	71,8	2001	66,3	2005	46
Mexico	126,4	47,24	54	59,8	1994	78,5	2000	64	2006	58,6	2000	57,2	2003	41,7	2006	58,9
Nicaragua	136,2	52,73	55	70,4	1996	76,4	2001	n/a	2006	61,2	1996	77,1	2001	n/a	2006	66,7
Panama	117,9	49,08	46	75,2	1994	73,7	1999	76,2	2004	n/a	1994	73,7	1999	75,9	2004	76,3
Paraguay	152,7	100,92	26	69,8	1998	80,5	2003	64,2	2008	60,3	1998	80,5	2003	64	2008	65,5
Peru	154,3	63,75	55	84	2000	82,6	2001*	81,4	2006	87,7	2000	82	2001	81,4	2006	88,7
Uruguay	13,2	10,44	3	90,7	1994	91,4	1999	91,8	2004	88,3	1994	91,4	1999	91,7	2004	89,6
Venezuela	83,5	60,86	14	53,9	1998	58,3	2000*	56,5	2006	74	1998	52,6	2000	56,6	2005	25,3
Average	109,5	56,8	34,4	67	--	72,4	--	66,5	--	69,2	--	66,5	--	64,2	--	65,9

Source: Owner calculation based on IDEA (<http://www.idea.int/vt/>) for registered voters and turnout; and on World Development Indicators database and CIA World Factbook for population.

- (1) In order to calculate the increase in the registered electors was considered the number of people allowed to vote in the first parliamentary election of the eighties and the number of allowed voters in the last parliamentary election (the research was done in April 2009). Argentina 1983-2007; Bolivia 1980-2005; Brazil 1982-2006; Chile 1989-2005; Colombia 1982-2006; Costa Rica 1982-2006; Ecuador 1984-2006; El Salvador 1988-2006; Guatemala 1982-2007; Honduras 1980-2005; Mexico 1982-2006; Nicaragua 1984-2006; Panamá 1984-2004; Paraguay 1983-2008; Peru 1980-2006; Uruguay 1984-2004; Venezuela 1983-2005.
  - (2) The column shows the increase of the population in the same period selected for the previous column (% increase of the registered voters)
  - (3) The columns shows the variation in the registered voters which can not be explained by natural increase of population but by other reason like the extension of political rights to more population.
  - (4) Voting is compulsory in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay and is not compulsory in Colombia, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama and Venezuela..
- \* A few months after assuming the Fujimori's controversial third term a serious institutional crisis broke. Fujimori resigned from Japan and a new election was called. In Venezuela, Chavez assumed in 1999 and convened a constituent assembly to reform the constitution. After the adoption its early elections were called to ratify various mandates under the new constitution.

**Table 5. Direct Democracy Mechanisms used at the National level 1958-2009**

Country	Mandatory referendum	Who can call for a referendum?			Experiences Year/Origen	Influence of Direct Democracy <sup>4</sup>
		President	Parliament	Citizenry		
Argentina	NO	SI ( <i>No vinc</i> )	SI	NO	1994, President	<i>Weak</i>
Bolivia	SI	SI	SI	SI	2004, 2008 and 2009 President; 2006,2008 Opposition	<i>Strong</i>
Brasil	SI <sup>1</sup>	SI( <i>No vinc</i> )	SI	SI	1993 Mandatory; 2005 Parliament	<i>Medium</i>
Chile	NO	SI ( <i>excep</i> ) <sup>2</sup>	NO	NO	1978, 1980, 1988 Militar Regim; 1989 Constitutional Ratification	<i>Weak</i> <sup>5</sup>
Colombia	SI	SI	NO	SI	1990 electoral curt; 1997, 2005 President	<i>Medium</i>
Costa Rica	NO	NO	NO	SI	2007 President	<i>Medium</i>
Ecuador	SI	SI	SI	SI	1979, 2008 Mandatory; 1986,1994,1995,1997, 2006,2007, President	<i>Strong</i>
El Salvador	SI	NO	NO	NO	--	<i>Nule</i>
Guatemala	SI	SI	SI	SI	1994 President, 1999 Mandatory	<i>Medium</i>
Honduras	NO	SI	SI	SI	--	<i>Weak</i>
México	NO	NO	NO	NO	--	<i>Nule</i>
Nicaragua	NO	SI	NO	SI	--	<i>Weak</i>
Panamá	SI <sup>1</sup>	NO	NO	NO	1977, 1983 Militar Regime;1992, 1998, 2006 Mandatory	<i>Medium</i>
Paraguay	SI <sup>1</sup>	SI <sup>3</sup>	SI	SI	--	<i>Weak</i>
Perú	SI	NO	NO	SI	1993 President	<i>Medium</i>
Uruguay	SI	NO	Si	SI	1958, 1962,1966, 1971, 1980,1989, 1989,1992,1994, 1994,1996,1999, 2003,2004	<i>Strong</i>
Venezuela	SI	SI	SI	Si	1999,1999,2002 President, 2007; 2004 Opposition; 2007, 2009 Mandatory	<i>Strong</i>

Source: C2D Database ([www.c2d.ch](http://www.c2d.ch)) Welp 2009

- (1) Referendum only can be called for political-administrative amendments in Brazil and Colombia; and for territorial agreements between countries in El Salvador and Guatemala. In the rest of the countries in which mandatory referendum exists applies for constitutional ratifications. In Peru and Guatemala referendum can be avoided through legislative ratification.
- (2) In Chile the president can call a plebiscite only when there is a disagreement between executive and legislative powers.
- (3) In Paraguay the president needs the approval of the parliament to call a referendum.
- (4) The classification is based in both dimensions, law and practices: the influence of dd is considered Strong in countries in which laws and practices of dd have a clear effect in the policy making process; Medium are countries in which direct democracy had some influence although it includes both, countries with a developed law and few experiences (e.g. Colombia) or with some development in law and erratic practices (e.g Peru); as weak were classified countries with a narrow law and irrelevant uses (e.g. Argentina); None are the countries without developments (For detailed information about the different countries see Welp 2009).
- (5) Chile is classified considering the democratic period in which the law allowing dd is narrow and there weren't any practices.

**Table 6: ICT development by Latin American Governments. Statement of Condition**

Country	Orientation of the Government Portals <sup>1</sup>	Legislative portal <sup>2</sup>	Contract System <sup>3</sup>	Guides of procedures <sup>4</sup>	Level of Participation <sup>5</sup>
Argentina	Citizen oriented	Yes	Transactional	Informative	Full
Bolivia	Administrative	Yes	Transactional	Informative	Full
Brazil	Citizen oriented	Yes	Informative	Transactional	Full
Chile	Administrative	Yes	Transactional	Transactional	Intermediate
Colombia	Citizen oriented	Yes	Transactional	Informative	Intermediate
Costa Rica	Citizen oriented	Yes	Informative	Informative	Intermediate
Ecuador	Government	Yes	Transactional	---	Basic
El Salvador	Citizen oriented	Yes	---	Transactional	Basic
Guatemala	Government	Yes	Transactional	---	Full
Honduras	Administrative	No	Transactional	---	Intermediate
Mexico	Citizen oriented	Yes	---	Informative	Full
Nicaragua	Administrative	Yes	---	Informative	Intermediate
Panama	Citizen oriented	Yes	Transactional	Transactional	Intermediate
Paraguay	Government	Yes	Informative	---	Intermediate
Peru	Citizen oriented	Yes	Transactional	Transactional	Intermediate
Uruguay	Administrative	Yes	Informative	---	Basic
Venezuela	Administrative	Yes	---	Informative	Full

Source: Self-reported data. A complete report can be consulted in Welp 2007

(1) Orientation of the Government Portals. *Government*: information about the activity of the Executive Power. *Administrative*: administrative information organized according to the offering of the administration; *Citizen Oriented*: administrative information organized according to the citizens' demand (by profiles and subjects rather than by departments, easily accessible in terms of vocabulary and organization).

(2) Legislative Portal. Existence (Yes/No)

(3) Contract System: State contracting and procurement systems. *Informative*: only supply of information or *Transactional*: transactions are allowed.

(4) Guides of Procedures. Existence and level of development. *Informative*: only supply of information or *Transactional*: transactions are allowed.

(5) Level of participation of the channels in the website: *Basic*: Mailbox, Symbolic participation. *Intermediate*: mailbox and proposals or interactive channels. *Fully*: mailbox, Proposals (demands, complaints and proposals from an individual) and Interactive (interactive participation) spaces for citizen interaction to make proposals.